

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7232

INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPOE 0874

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, PINS, SHUM, SN, MY

SUBJECT: GOS STOKES FIRES OF LEONG MUN KWAI AFFAIR

REFS: A. KUALA LUMPUR 1282, B. SINGAPORE 0777

1. SUMMARY. SOG ON MARCH 1 PROVIDED LEONG MUN KWAI WITH PLATFORM FROM WHICH TO REFUTE DENIAL BY MALAYSIA'S CHIEF POLICE OFFICER, TAN SRI HANIFF OMAR, THAT MALAYSIAN SPECIAL BRANCH (MSB) WAS INVOLVED IN "BLACK OPERATION" DIRECTED AGAINST SINGAPORE. LEONG ALSO USED OCCASION TO DENY CHARGE BY YAP CHIN KWEE, ONE OF THE ALLEGED LINKMEN, THAT LEONG HAD LIED. UNWILLINGNESS OF SOME FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN LEONG'S PRESS CONFERENCE AND WORKERS PARTY JEYARETNAM'S DEFENSE OF WP ELECTORAL FRONT WITH PF ACCOMPANIED LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN THIS AFFAIR. ABOUT THE ONLY THING THAT IS CLEAR AT THIS POINT, IS THAT GOS IS NOT PREPARED TO LET MATTER REST UNTIL SOME AS YET UNKNOWN OBJECTIVE HAS BEEN ACHIEVED --PROBABLY SOME INDICATION THAT GOM IS SEIZED WITH SERIOUSNESS OF ALLEGED AFFAIR AND IS MOVING TO TAKE APPROPRIATE REMEDIAL ACTION. WE HAVE UNCONFIRMED REPORT THAT GOM WAS "FUMING" ABOUT AFFAIR PRIOR TO LATEST REVELATIONS AND COULD IMAGINE THAT LATEST DEVELOPMENT HAS NOT IMPROVED MATTERS. END SUMMARY.

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2. DURING MARCH 1 GOS-SPONSORED TELEVISED PRESS CONFERENCE, LEONG MUN KWAI REBUTTED MALAYSIAN INSPECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE (IGP) TAN SRI HANIFF OMAR'S CATEGORICAL DENIAL (REF A) THAT MALAYSIAN SPECIAL BRANCH (MSNB) OR TWO OF ITS OFFICERS WERE INVOLVED IN THE "BLACK PLOT" TO TOPPLE LEE KUAN YEW (REF B). LEONG REFUTED HANIFF'S DENIAL POINT-BY-POINT, ALTHOUGH LEONG'S DENIAL THAT HE HAD EVER REQUESTED POLITICALY ASYLUM OR PERMANENT

STAY IN MALAYSIAN OBLIQUELY CONFLICTED WITH PART OF HIS FEBRUARY 25 STATEMENT IN WHICH LEONG NOTED THAT HE HAD APPLIED TO SEVERAL COUNTRIES FOR POLITICAL ASYLUM.

3. LEONG SPECIFICALLY CLAIMED THAT HANIFF WAS WRONG IN ASSERTING THAT LEONG HAD VISITED MALAYSIA ON TWO-WEEK SOCIAL PASSES. PHOTO COPIES OF LEONG'S PASSPORT WERE PRODUCED DURING TELEVISED PRESS CONFERENCE TO SHOW THAT TWELVE EXTENSIONS HAD BEEN GRANTED. LEONG COMMENTED THAT SOMEONE LIKE HIM WHO HAS NO WORK AND IS NOT AN INVESTOR NORMALLY FIND IT DIFFICULT TO GET EVEN ONE EXTENSION, MUCH LESS TWELVE.

4. LEONG ALSO USED OPPORTUNITY OF PRESS CONFERENCE TO CLAIM THAT YAP CHIN KWEE, THE ALLEGED LINKMAN WHO HAD INTRODUCED HIM TO TWO MSB OFFICERS, HAD LIED WHEN HE HAD FIRST DENIED HAVING INTRODUCED LEONG TO THE TWO MALAYSIAN OFFICIALS. LEONG ALSO ASSERTED THAT YAP WAS WRONG IN SAYING THAT THEY HAD FIRST MET IN 1969 OR 1970. MARCH 2 NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF TELEVISED PRESS CONFERENCE WAS EXTENSIVE; SELECTED SLIPPINGS BEING FORWARDED TO EMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR AND DEPARTMENT.

5. MARCH 2 ENGLISH LANGUAGE PRESS ALSO CARRIED STATEMENTS MADE EARLIER ON MARCH 1 DURING PRESS CONFERENCE BY WORKERS PARTY (WP) SECRETARY-GENERAL JEYARATNAM. JEYARATNAM CATEGORICALLY STATED THAT WP WAS INVOLVED IN NO OPERATION TO TOPPLE THE PAP GOVERNMENT THROUGH ANY BLACK OPERATION, ALTHOUGH WP HAD "ENGAGED IN THAT OPERATION (TO TOPPLE PAP DURING DECEMBER ELECTIONS) BUT QUITE LEGITIMATELY AND QUITE OPENLY". JEYARETNAM SPECIFICALLY REJECTED LEONG'S ALLEGATION THAT IT CONFIDENTIAL

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HAD BEEN EASY TO INFILTRATE THE WP BECAUSE IT HAD ACCEPTED CANDIDATES AT RANDOM. JEYARETNAM CLAIMED THAT WP HAD REJECTED THREE CANDIDATES PROPOSED BY LEONG.

6. JEYARETNAM ALSO REFERRED TO LEONG'S REVELATIONS AS PAP EFFORT TO THOROUGHLY VANQUISH WP, CLAIMING THAT PAP WAS NOT SATISFIED WITH SWEEPING ALL 69 CONSTITUENCIES AND GARNERING 75 PERCENT OF POPULAR VOTE IN RECENT ELECTIONS. JEYARETNAM ASSERTED THAT "WE SEE THIS ATTEMPT TO GET PERSONS DETAINED OR IMPRISONED TO MAKE STATEMENTS TRYING TO IMPLICATE THE WORKERS PARTY AS AN ATTEMPT TO DISCREDIT THE WORKERS PARTY IN THE EYES OF THE ELECTORATE". JEYARETNAM SAID GOS CAMPAIGN WAS LAUNCHED AT LEAST PARTLY WITH VIEW TO ELIMINATING PAP'S MOST CREDIBLE POLITICAL OPPOSITION BECAUSE OF PROSPECT OF TWO BY-ELECTIONS IN NEAR FUTURE.

7. OTHER INTERESTING SIDELIGHT SURROUNDING LEONG'S PRESS

CONFERENCE WAS FACT THAT SIX WESTERN JOURNALISTS, WHO ARRIVED AT RTS STUDIO FOR TELEVISED PRESS CONFERENCE, DECLINED TO PARTICIPATE FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS, RANGING FROM "STATE ATMOSPHERE" OF CONFERENCE TO ONE OF REGARDING SESSION AS AN "INTERNAL AFFAIR". HOWEVER, TOTAL OF 26 INDIVIDUALS, INCLUDING 13 FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS, WERE PRESENT AT THE CONFERENCE. DECISION BY SIX WESTERN JOURNALISTS NOT TO PARTICIPATE WAS TERMED "WALK-OUT" IN MARCH 2 STRAITS TIMES (ST) AND WAS GIVEN DETAILED, INDIVIDUALIZED TREATMENT IN AFTERNOON NEW NATION (NN). UNUSUAL TREATMENT GIVEN THIS INCIDENT MIGHT FORESHADOW FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS.

8. COMMENT. WHETHER LEONG REQUESTED PRESS CONFERENCE (AS AT LEAST ONE SOURCE CLAIMS) OR WHETHER LEONG ACCEDED TO GOS WISH THAT HE REBUT HANIFF'S DENIAL OF LEONG'S ORIGINAL ALLEGATIONS, FACT CONFIDENTIAL

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REMAINS THAT GOS PROVIDED LEONG WITH PLATFORM TO ADD FURTHER FUEL TO INCIDENT WHICH MAY VERY WELL BE INFLAMING MALAYSIAN SENSITIVITIES. THE FORUM PROVIDED LEONG BY GOS AND THE INTERPRETING ASSISTANCE GIVEN BY THE CULTURE MINISTRY'S TRANSLATION SERVICE CHIEF CLEARLY INDICATES THAT GOS FINDS PERSUASIVE THE PLOT ALLEGATIONS MADE BY LEONG AND IS PREPARED TO PUSH THEM DESPITE CATEGORICAL DENIAL BY MALAYSIAN IGP.

9. GOS AGGRESSIVENESS IN PURSUING THIS MATTER WAS HARDLY MITIGATED BY CONCILIATORY REMARKS UTTERED BY LEONG. IN RESPONSE TO REQUEST TO NAME MALAYSIAN POLITICIAN HE IMPLICATED IN THE "BLACK PLOT", LEONG STATED THAT POLITICIAN'S IDENTITY HAD BEEN REVEALED TO GOS AND THAT HIS NAME WOULD BE REVEALED TO GOM UPON REQUEST. IN WHAT APPEARED TO BE CAREFULLY REHEARSED STATEMENT, LEONG ADDED THAT "TO INSURE GOOD RELATIONS BETWEEN SINGAPORE AND MALAYSIA, AND IN THE INTERESTS OF ASEAN SOLIDARITY, I HAVE ACCEPTED LOCAL AUTHORITIES' ADVICE NOT TO DISCLOSE HIS IDENTITY OR ANY DETAILS ABOUT HIM".

10. CLEARLY, GOS IS SEEKING TO PUSH GOM INTO TAKING APPROPRIATE AND TIMELY ACTION AGAINST MALAYSIANS INVOLVED IN THE PLOT AS REVEALED BY LEONG. IT IS PURSUING ITS OBJECTIVES IN CHARACTERISTICALLY STRAIGHT-FORWARD AND BLUNT SINGAPOREAN MANNER AND APPARENTLY WILL NOT BE SATISFIED BY SEEING MATTER HUSHED UP OR DEALT WITH IN AN INDIRECT FASHION. MALAYSIAN HIGH COMMISSION FIRST SECRETARY TOLD PAO PRIOR TO LEONG'S PRESS CONFERENCE THAT GOM WAS "FUMING" ABOUT AFFAIR AND, IF THIS REPORT WAS ACCURATE, IT SEEMS SAFE TO ASSUME THAT LEONG'S PRESS

CONFERENCE WILL ONLY AGGRAVATE MATTERS FURTHER.

11. AS FOR JEYARATNAM'S ALLEGATIONS, WE BELIEVE IT UNLIKELY
THAT LEONG AFFAIR IS SOLELY OR PRIMARILY EFFORT TO DISCREDIT
WP ALTHOUGH SUCH A RESULT WOULD PROBABLY PLEASE PAP
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